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Exploring the Importance and Challenges of Quality Assurance in Enhancing University Education in a Developing Country

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ABSTRACT

Quality assurance and accreditation (QAA) processes originated in the business discipline and are now used in higher education institutions in Afghanistan to enhance quality of education. Students and lecturers show limited engagement with and are unaware of the concept and criteria of quality assurance at universities in Afghanistan. This scientific study aimed to explore the concept and importance of QAA for improving developing countries' higher education systems. It investigates the engagement of internal and external stakeholders in the process of quality assurance in higher education institutions. This research adopted a systematic review of the literature and analyzed data by coding, categorizing, and interpreting valid and reliable articles. The study revealed that quality assurance is indispensable for private and public universities. The university should inform stakeholders such as students and lecturers about QAA standards through awareness sessions. Across multiple studies, it is evident that quality assurance is a systematic process that needs qualified internal and external auditors who help the university improve the quality of education and meet national and international job market needs. The university should develop a quality culture and work on the suggested points that are recommended by examiners after assessing specific programs at the university. Quality assurance and accreditation contribute to helping public and private universities educate students for the national industry and global job market. Quality assurance and accreditation are conducive to increasing the employability percentage in developing countries.

KEYWORDS: *Academic Outcomes, Accreditation, Higher Education System, Quality Assurance.*

Introduction

Quality higher education is the priority of nations worldwide, and it has an impact on the social and economic well-being of citizens. Quality education connects academia with industry for developing the quality of products and services. The 21st-century job market requires professional and skilled fresh graduates to work in industries. Job providers give priority to candidates with soft skills, research skills, and technical skills. Quality assurance promotes the success of higher education systems and is implemented in many private and public universities around the world. However, Quality assurance is a new trend in Afghanistan. It is essential for developing quality education, but it involves a complex process that is unclear to many students at universities in this country.

During the quality assurance and accreditation process, collecting and analyzing large amounts of data is a challenging job for higher education organizations (Javed & Alenezi, 2023). Also, college students have limited information about the 11 standards and 49 sub-standards of quality assurance used for assessing private and public universities across Afghanistan. Moreover, finding a job after graduation is problematic for fresh graduates because of the quality of education. College students and newly appointed lecturers have limited ideas about the importance of QAA. Nadir and Auzarmi (2021) discussed that the seventh stage of quality assurance deals with lecturers and staff, and the eighth one with students' experiences. Quality assurance standards do not support the promotion of technology facilities at the university. The eleventh standard assesses technology integration with teaching and learning. The fourth standard assesses the university's

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leadership and administration. Despite increasing attention, gaps remain regarding quality assurance at universities in Afghanistan.

Additionally, Amjad and Mahmood (2024) found that counseling services are not promoted in private and public institutions, which makes the process of learning complex for students. The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Department at the Ministry of Higher Education used the same indicators for historical and newly established universities, which makes quality assurance less impactful.

Different theoretical perspectives on QAA have been proposed. The current study adopted Total Quality Management (TQM) and stakeholder theory. Total quality management is an approach used in higher education institutions and industry to satisfy long-term achievement, motivate workers, promote students' and customers' needs, and apply government-proposed rules and laws. As Zabadi (2013) proposed, the TQM theory is for improving quality education at universities. Also, Harvey and Green (1993) stated, "Quality can be viewed as exceptional, as perfection, as fitness for purpose, as value for money and as transformation" (p.2). The research explores the engagement of college students in the process of quality assurance process. It investigates the concept of QAA in higher education institutions and the alignment of quality assurance standards with industry demands.

Research Questions

1. What is the concept of Quality Assurance and Accreditation at universities?
2. What are the challenges for quality assurance in higher education in developing countries?
3. What is the importance of quality assurance in improving higher education institutions' outcomes?

Objectives

- To explore the concept of Quality Assurance and Accreditation, as applied to universities in Afghanistan.
- To investigate the challenges of quality assurance in developing countries.
- To identify the roles of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in the education system of developing countries.

The exploratory research is conducive to developing a quality assurance process at public and private universities across Afghanistan. In addition, the results benefit university students, lecturers, and staff by providing standard education. The article provides clear suggestions for the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Directorate of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE).

Literature Review

The article explores the concept of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education institutions and investigates the importance of quality assurance for improving the quality of education in developing countries. As stated by Patel (2016), higher education is a place for developing human capital and training researchers and scientists. Furthermore, Yusufzada, Xia, and Sediqi (2020) found that education can play an important role in the advancement of developing countries such as Afghanistan. The Afghan higher education system does not match international requirements due to limited infrastructure and a lack of practical, student-centered teaching methods at universities. Understanding the definition of quality is essential before addressing quality assurance at the university. Therefore, this literature review is organized into the following themes: concept and history of quality assurance, execution of quality assurance, benefits of quality assurance, and challenges of quality assurance in developing countries.

Concept and history of Quality Assurance

Harvey and Green (1993) discussed that quality does not have a fixed definition, and has various meanings for different people. According to Welzant et al. (2011), the term quality is multidimensional, so it is a challenging task to define it. In the traditional education system, quality means high-class or uniqueness, and there was no standard to measure quality at universities in the past. In the 21st century, quality is understood as purposeful, exceptional, transformative, and accountable, and these are the four major conceptualizations of quality used today. The quality management approach was used in higher education in the 1980s, where industry had experienced this management approach in the 1970s. In the 1990s, quality management usage developed in higher education institutions to make the section more dynamic. Hanh et al. (2019) reported that the quality assurance concept is derived from business discipline and applied to higher education. Internal quality assurance and external quality assurance both affect the accreditation of a university. In the same vein,

Usmani and Khatoon (2016) stated that quality assurance is an organized process of collecting and analyzing data to ensure quality education at the university. Also, Suleiman (2023) mentioned quality assurance as a well-structured process that ensures quality education and improves the quality of teaching and learning over time.

Dill (2007) pointed out that traditionally, the quality assurances of external frameworks were different from country to country. There were three main models that external auditors used: the European model, the United States of America model, and the United Kingdom model. Wang (2014) reported that China implemented QA in the1980s but continues to refine its mechanism for improving university outcomes. Student engagement is a key focus, and researchers are evaluated by external QA units. According to Prisăcariu (2014), trust and responsibility are core elements of European QA models, which must be supported by Ministries of Higher Education.

As stated byNadir and Auzarmi (2021), quality assurance is a constant process of monitoring and evaluating the academic performance of a university based on standard criteria. Makhoul (2019) emphasized that the regional accreditation process helps universities solve the barriers they face during the quality assurance process. The accreditation process evaluates university improvement based on pre-prepared standards. Most studies agreed that quality assurance is a comprehensive process that requires experts to conduct a departmental and university-level assessment.

Implementation of Quality Assurance

Quality assurance requires mechanisms and procedures to ensure the quality of education. Today, quality in higher education implies perfection, excellence, goal alignment, and transformation (Hamad & Hammadi, 2011). According to Hosseinzadeh et al. (2019), quality assurance standards are used to examine university infrastructure, input, and output to provide solutions for the challenges faced. Suleiman (2023) outlined seven QA components, such as clear vision and mission, curriculum design, trained lecturers, continuous assessment, research and innovation, infrastructure and facilities, and teaching and learning methods. Additionally, Javed and Alenezi (2023) found that QA frameworks help the Ministry of Higher Education to differentiate between institutions using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Previous studies demonstrated that in the process of quality assurance and accreditation, higher education institutions collect data, analyze the data, and share the report with the targeted university administration.

Merabishvili, Tsereteli, and Bellon (2017) demonstrated how quality assurance management prepares students to meet international standards. Georgia, for example, as a developing country, is adopting standards to improve universities. According to Makhoul (2019), core evaluation areas are: administrative integrity, mindset, effective teaching, student services and engagement, and knowledge management. Adapting the QAA management approach requires more flexibility in the higher education system. As stated by Ibrahim (2014), accreditation assesses university programs to confirm service quality and guide improvement. Both public and private universities need QA frameworks aligned with global standards (Amjad & Mahmood, 2024). According to Nadir and Auzarmi (2021), Afghanistan's QA framework includes 11 standards and 49 sub-criteria developed by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). These standards aim to align the education system with societal and international community needs.

Importance of Quality Assurance

Quality assurance plays a key role in the advancement of education in developed countries, and it helps developing countries to improve the quality of education. Kayyali (2023) called it a fundamental necessity for higher education institutions. Wang (2014) mentioned that quality assurance is a university goal because governments want to see their universities in the high-ranking lists compiled by assessing the quality of services provided by universities. Furthermore, Usmani and Khatoon (2016) argued that quality assurance faced universities with problems for healthy completion because quality assurance is developed in developing countries' education systems. Haq et al. (2020) noted that consumer (student) awareness is essential in public and private universities, and it remains a challenge in HEC Pakistan. The Higher Education Commission should train qualified staff to perform the quality assurance process at universities. Training should be provided to employees about the main concept and criteria of quality assurance. To provide quality education, HEC and other stakeholders must work on the curriculum development process because it provides an opportunity for students' practical work.

Students and teachers are the core elements of quality management; therefore, internal quality assurance committees involve students through a survey and ask for their feedback on teaching and resources (Zhang et al., 2022). Students' perceptions are vital, but universities must consider these views in relation to long-term academic and career

goals. Students play effective roles in the process of learning; they have to consider the center of evaluation. Harvey and Green (1993) suggested that students should be empowered to transform through their university experience.

Challenges of Quality Assurance in Developing Countries

Developing countries face numerous obstacles in QA implementation. Aburizaizah (2022) observed that university leaders often lack knowledge of self-assessment, and funding shortages from education ministries hinder QA efforts. For example, the author revealed that university centralization and bureaucracy limit the creativity of universities in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, Mokhtar et al. (2014) identified that academic quality assurance in Malaysian universities needs communication, quality assurance units, and a culture of quality. Moreover, a study conducted in Pakistan suggested shortage of data related to quality assurance makes the identification of quality assurance problematic (Haq et al., 2020). To compete with international universities, Afghanistan University should consider continuous changes in the curriculum and educational leadership (Yusufzada et al., 2020). Additionally, higher education institutions must address youth unemployment through more relevant academic programs.

The literature highlighted the importance and challenges of QA for enhancing quality education at universities. The authors suggested different ways for overcoming the challenges of quality assurance at universities in developing countries. Quality assurance is essential for developing countries' higher education systems because it helps them align with industry and global higher education needs. Universities must ensure that self-study reports are accurate and reflect the internal QA unit's findings.

Methodology

The research was performed with an exploratory research design. A systematic literature review was completed because of partial information from college students and lecturers about QAA (Quality Assurance and Accreditation) in Afghanistan. Quality assurance standards have been used at universities, but many students do not know about their importance at their universities. Therefore, the author chose a qualitative approach for reviewing articles for the current study.

The systematic review was conducted by reviewing, evaluating, and synthesizing the targeted articles. Researchers use a qualitative approach when seeking in-depth information about the specific research topic (Kasinath, 2013). The article identification process was based on the keywords (Quality assurance, evaluation, standards for quality education, impact of quality assurance, quality education, job market) in the context. The used articles were published from 2010 to 2025 in highly indexed journals, such as Elsevier, Springer, Scopus, and Asian journals. The targeted articles were reviewed, coded, and categorized to provide thematic information. The scientific study was conducted in three months, which included a review period.

Sampling Method

This systematic literature review focused on secondary data, which includes reliable and valid articles. Both qualitative and quantitative articles were included in the initial stage of the study. The articles selected were collected from Google Scholar, AcademicJournals.org, the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and EBSCO Information Services. Creswell (2008) stated that purposive sampling is a data collection strategy that researchers select textual data that meets their research article needs.

Data Collection

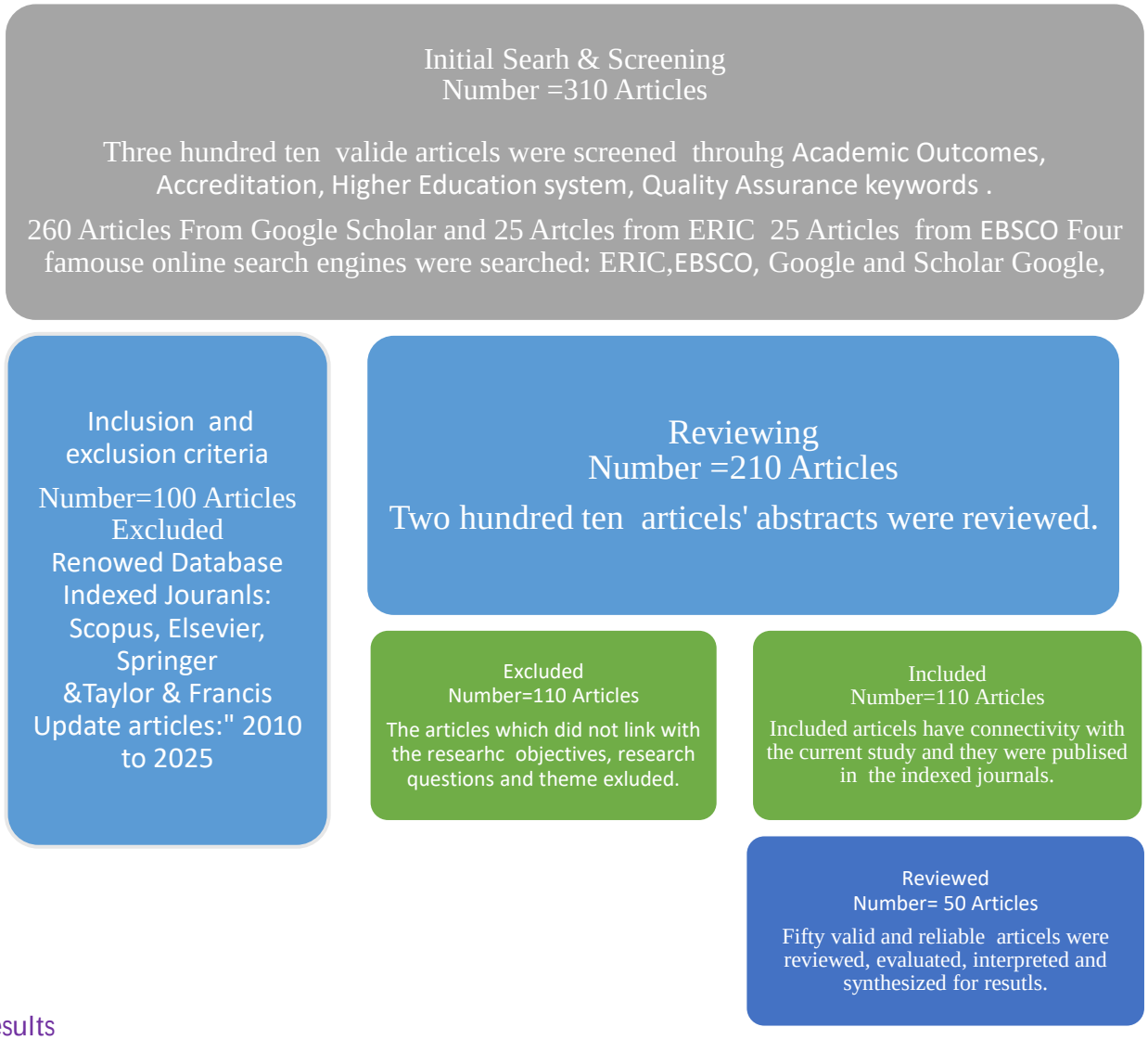
The researcher considered 310 three hundred ten articles in the screening process according to the keywords such as quality assurance, higher education, developing countries, models, and internal assessment committee. Two hundred sixty of the articles came from Google Scholar, 25 articles from ERIC, and 25 articles from EBSCO Essentials were collected. The researcher downloaded most articles from Google Scholar because highly indexed journals are listed in Google Scholar. Next, the author reviewed the abstracts of 220 articles and selected only 100 articles that were closely related to the research topic. Ultimately, the author reviewed fifty articles and selected 50 for the annotated bibliography because they met the current research project needs.

Data Analysis

The targeted articles were reviewed and analyzed, and the themes emerged to answer the research questions. The information was assembled purposefully, and the articles were thematically analyzed and interpreted after a careful note-

taking process. First, the researcher coded all articles and categorized them to make the findings comprehensible for readers. As stated by Peel (2020), thematic analysis of articles is an essential approach in the qualitative research paradigm because analyzing articles thematically assists readers in realizing and using the results of the study. The writer thoroughly applied the steps to find valid and reliable results. The educational researcher can code, categorize, and organize large volumes of qualitative data into themes. Key themes emerging from the literature included the importance of QAA at universities in developing countries, challenges of quality assurance for higher education institutions, and implementation of quality assurance at universities through internal and external audit programs.

Figure 1: The systematic review of the article process.


Initial Searh & Screening
Number =310 Articles
Three hundred ten valide articels were screened throuhg Academic Outcomes, Accreditation, Higher Education system, Quality Assurance keywords .
260 Articles From Google Scholar and 25 Artcles from ERIC 25 Articles from EBSCO Four famouse online search engines were searched: ERIC,EBSCO, Google and Scholar Google,
Inclusion and exclusion criteria
Number=100 Articles Excluded
Renowed Database Indexed Jouranls: Scopus, Elsevier, Springer &Taylor & Francis
Update articles:" 2010 to 2025
Reviewing
Number =210 Articles
Two hundred ten articels' abstracts were reviewed.
Excluded
Number=110 Articles
The articles which did not link with the researhc objectives, research questions and theme exluded.
Included
Number=110 Articles
Included articels have connectivity with the current study and they were publised in the indexed journals.
Reviewed
Number= 50 Articles
Fifty valid and reliable articels were reviewed, evaluated, interpreted and synthesized for resutls.

Results

The systematic literature review was conducted to explore the concept of quality assurance, its importance, and the implementation of QAA at universities in developing countries. The current study was performed to answer three research questions. The first question explores the concept of quality assurance in developing countries and the importance of quality assurance for providing quality education that meets labor market needs. The second research question deals with engaging students in the process of quality assurance. Higher education accreditation programs help students develop quality education and work to advance the quality of teaching and learning that meets the standards of the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Directorate of higher education (Kayyali, 2023).

What is the concept of Quality Assurance and Accreditation at universities? First of all, Amjad and Mahmood (2024) stated that quality assurance has increased (?) the quality of education in higher education institutions. Quality education involves using an updated curriculum, student-centered approaches, and project-based teaching, all of which

help students find employment (Suleiman, 2023). Similarly, Kayyali (2023) found that quality assurance and accreditation (QAA) frameworks include leadership, strategic plan, customers, measurement, analysis, knowledge management, workforce, operation, and results. Additionally, the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan considers a model for quality assurance that contains six categories: goal setting, result-oriented, assessment and evaluation of collected data, data collection, analysis and evaluation, and decision making (Rasool, Arshad, & Ali, 2019). Diagnostic, descriptive, prescriptive, and predictive are four types of data analytics during the process of analyzing accreditation KPIs (Javed & Alenezi, 2023).

According to Makhoul (2019), teachers' and students' qualifications in the quality assurance and accreditation process measurements mechanism are essential. The quality assurance process encourages lecturers and learners to perform better to meet the standards of the labor market. Quality assurance standards should be based on community needs. Likewise, Kayyali (2023) explained that quality assurance should impact students' performance because they are a major element of the teaching and learning process. Moreover, students' opinions are important in the quality assurance process, as they help ensure world-class education (Wang, 2014). Professors play essential roles in higher education (Patel, 2016). According to Merabishvili, Tsereteli, and Bellon (2017), the United States of America and European countries define the roles of students' engagement in the quality assurance process. Emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement are essential in the quality assurance management process. Harvey and Green (1993) defined education as transforming students and researchers and training them for ongoing transformation instead of serving customers. Zhang et al. (2022) suggested market, institution, and government are the main implementers of QA in the Chinese private university.

Quality assurance is implemented in developing countries' universities to provide high-quality education that matches international needs (Amjad & Mahmood, 2024). Also, Hanh, Nga, Loan, and Viet (2019) stated that developed and developing countries accepted quality assurance as a main goal for nations developing worldwide. The quality assurance process helps the university to improve teaching, learning, and research, which are its main areas of service. According to Rasool, Arshad, and Ali (2019), quality education helps developing countries to develop economic systems by providing quality assurance. The literature explored that the quality assurance process requires time and is a continuous process.

The second research question explores challenges for quality assurance in higher education institutions in developing countries. Mussawy (2020) mentioned that quality assurance is essential for improving the quality of education in developing countries, as information gaps and underqualified or evolving faculty pose serious challenges for QAA. Suleiman (2023) highlighted that developing countries' higher education institutions use outdated curricula, limited infrastructure, traditional teaching approaches, weak assessment, and limited resources. The Ministry of Higher Education should develop a qualified quality assurance community for assessing, analyzing, and reporting the performance of universities. The quality assurance process should consider research and initiation, and be used to develop good habits among students and teachers. The quality assurance process can create a good culture of research and reduce plagiarism. Makhoul (2019) stated that parents, students, and lecturers faced challenges in choosing a university for learning and services, partially based on quality concerns. The evidence consistently showed that students, parents, and employers are the main stakeholders of universities, and they have to be involved in the process of developing KPIs and implementing quality assurance at universities.

Quality assurance is conducted by internal units or by asking external units to accredit the university or program (Ibrahim, 2014). Furthermore, Siyouki et al. (2016) mentioned that internal committee evaluation is vital for implementing the quality assurance process. Universities should develop their KPIs for the internal quality assurance process as well, and they can use software for collecting qualitative and quantitative data during the process of quality assurance and accreditation (Javed & Alenezi, 2023). Higher education institutions should accept the importance of quality assurance, and they must provide awareness programs for students, lecturers, and staff (Kayyali, 2023). Quality assurance helps the Minister of Higher Education globalize the educational system and encourages programs to provide online education and integrate technology into the education system. Harvey and Green (1993) stated that through a quality culture, institutions make everyone responsible for assessing and developing quality. Students' feedback is very helpful for assessing the programs. Students and lecturers should concentrate on the process of learning and the employees' understanding of higher education outcomes.

Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2003) argued that universities and industry can review Quality Management (QM) theories to overcome challenges. Quality management improved excellently and paved the way for evaluation. Quality

assurance is complex; it covers plans, actions, polices, strategies, and attitudes. (Mokhtar, Abdul Rahman, Othman, & Mat Ali, 2014). Self-evaluation and regulation should be improved during the quality management process at the university (Zhang et al., 2022). Self-evaluation and regulation should be strengthened (Zhang et al., 2022). The synthesized results indicated that universities should allow students to submit anonymous feedback to enhance service quality.

The last research questions investigate the roles of quality assurance in improving higher education institutions' outcomes. According to Prisăcariu (2014), quality education increases personal development, prepares students for the job market, develops social life, and improves the knowledge and insights of citizens. Also, Aburizaizah (2022) identified curriculum, learning outcomes, lecturer competence, resources, and administration as core QA criteria. Kim (2008) emphasized that higher education should provide clear audit mechanisms for assessing university services, promote funding, and ensure public accountability. In addition, Mokhtar et al. (2014) evaluated that many countries founded agencies for assessing and monitoring the quality of education in higher education institutions. Also, Haq, Shahzadi, and Ayaz (2020) outlined that the successful implementation of quality assurance procedures helps universities in the internationalization of education. Furthermore, Adina-Petruța (2014) stressed the importance of higher education for upcoming generations. Belief, attitude, commitment, negotiation, and trust are the major elements of quality culture. External and internal quality assurance procedures require a quality culture. Zhang et al. (2022) concluded that quality assurance confirms that curriculum, teaching methods, and resources meet international and national standards. Most studies reported that quality culture and TQM principles enhance the quality of education at universities in developing countries.

Discussion

Quality assurance is a global phenomenon and is essential for students, professors, the government, and industry. The study found that students, lecturers, and staff should be aware of quality assurance and accreditation standards that are used by the Ministry of Higher Education. It revealed that the quality assurance process ensures quality education and helps universities to train skillful and insightful employees for the labor market. In the 1970s, the Quality management approach was used in business and industry, while it was introduced into higher education in the 1908s. Quality management is often prioritized more in the industry due to the direct need for skilled labor.

Higher education institutions should promote a quality culture. Everyone takes the responsibility for developing quality education to develop society. As Sihotang and Nadeak (2017) suggested, commitment, positive attitudes, and structural shifts are the major factors in developing the quality of education at the university. The Ministry of Higher Education prepares an effective mechanism for the implementation of quality assurance at private and public universities around Afghanistan. The quality assurance and accreditation directorate applied quality assurance frameworks in a pilot in 8 universities across Afghanistan in 2012-2016 (Nadir & Auzarmi, 2021). These authors also emphasized that QA implementation requires well-structured mechanisms.

Engaging both students and labor market stakeholders in the QA process is essential. Small businesses and governmental agencies often recruit recent graduates. Therefore, the universities should tailor their academic programs to market demands. Kayyali (2023) stated that higher education should be provided based on industry and job market demand. Quality assurance helps universities provide education based on job needs. In Afghanistan, during the quality assurance process, public and private universities should consider their stakeholders, which are students, teachers, staff, the government, and the job market. Many students report limited job opportunities after graduation. Therefore, universities should prepare future employees for the international job market. For increasing the employability rate, universities must consider the objectives of industry because they use our product (students) after graduation. The university should provide counseling services for students to promote the quality assurance process and prepare them for a professional career.

Universities are often evaluated based on how well their graduates contribute to national development. The QA and Accreditation Directorate sets standards aimed at increasing student employability. Amjad and Mahmood (2024) stated that quality assurance standards are used to improve students' insights and experiences. External auditors provide more value from the students' perspective when assessing university programs. Based on developed countries' experiences, students' engagement is essential for higher education quality assurance procedures. Students should be aware of all the improvements and challenges of quality assurance. They have to know the follow-up results. Delivering quality education

also requires committed leadership. Leaders must inspire faculty and staff to uphold QA standards (Sihotang & Nadeak, 2017). The university should include a curriculum that prepares students for the job market. The 20th century changed the shape of the traditional higher education system to meet the labor market needs.

The Total Quality Management (TQM) approach promotes collaboration, improves academic and administrative performance, and prioritizes student-centered perspectives in QA. Providing quality questions requires financial support and funds for maintenance. In the era of Electronic learning, quality assurance is vital for improving the quality of education in Higher education institutions. According to Siyouki et al. (2016), quality education contributes significantly to economic growth. Many developing countries work on the evaluation of higher education institutions' performance worldwide. In Afghanistan, Universities must develop cooperation at the regional and international levels to learn from the experiences of developed countries. Higher education institutions include various types of stakeholders such as teachers, students, founding agencies, the government, auditors, and staff. Students, professors, and teaching resources are the main components of education. Therefore, their involvement in the process of preparing KPIs and a strategy plan is vital. The results have important suggestions for developing quality education in developing countries through implementing the QAA framework. This requires financial support, qualified auditors, committed stakeholders, and a quality culture. For the involvement of stakeholders, the university must conduct an awareness program for all stakeholders, such as students, teachers, parents, industry, and government organizations, to overcome quality assurance challenges.

Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the concept and importance of engaging students in the process of quality assurance in the higher education system of developing countries. Quality assurance and accreditation are well-structured processes that require internal and external qualified units. Also, the Ministry of Higher Education should execute a quality culture where students, professors, and staff are responsible for developing the quality of education at private and public universities. The current study revealed that QA and accreditation improve the quality of education in developing countries. Higher education institutions provide quality education to grow the community and develop the national economy. Quality assurance enables students to study in prestigious universities and work with local and international organizations. QA develops the economies of nations and helps recent graduates find jobs. Quality assurance and accreditation are universal trends, and they require the attention of researchers and international organizations to financially support universities in developing countries such as Afghanistan. The university should allow for the development of KPIs for internal assessment that fit its infrastructure and resources. The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Directorate in the Ministry of Higher Education should provide quality assurance standards-related awareness training and workshops for students, lecturers, and staff. The current study is limited to a review of valid and reliable articles that are accessible in Afghanistan. I encourage researchers to perform qualitative and quantitative research on the topic at public and private universities because QAA is an important topic at universities and requires further investigation in Afghanistan.

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